New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1955

Volume XVI, Number 22 • Rachel W. Coffin, *Editor* • Week of November 21, 1955

1955 PRODUCTIONS
Premieres in Other Years
Original Reviews Appeared In These Volumes

Stage Play	1954 Vol.	*Page*
Anastasia		192
Anniversary Waltz		339
Bad Seed (The)		223
*Boy Friend (The)		299
Caine Mutiny Court Martial (The)		382
Dear Charles		316
*Fanny		256
Flowering Peach (The)		196
House of Flowers		189
Lunatics and Lovers		219
Mrs. Patterson		231
*Pajama Game (The)		324
Peter Pan		273
Quadrille		259
Rainmaker (The)		264
Reclining Figure		294
Saint of Bleecker Street (The)		199
Sandhog		239
Tender Trap (The)		282
Wedding Breakfast		243
What Every Woman Knows		208
*Witness for the Prosecution		216
	1953 Vol.	
Can-Can		304
Kismet		198
Solid Gold Cadillac (The)		222
Tea and Sympathy		266
*Teahouse of the August Moon (The)		254
	1952 Vol.	
Seven Year Itch (The)		186
	1951 Vol.	
Fourposter (The)		190

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of November 21, 1955*

1955 PRODUCTIONS
Premieres During 1955
Reviews Appear in This Volume

Stage Play	*Page*
All in One	325
Almost Crazy	298
Ankles Aweigh	329
Arlequin Poli Par L'Amour	217
Barbier de Seville (Le)	217
Bourgeois Gentilhomme (Le)	230
*Bus Stop	346
Carefree Tree (The)	249
*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof	342
Catch a Star!	290
*Chalk Garden (The)	227
Champagne Complex	334
*Damn Yankees	310
Dark Is Light Enough (The)	357
Day by the Sea (3)	279
Deadfall	224
*Desk Set (The)	234
Desperate Hours (The)	370
*Diary of Anne Frank (The)	257
Doctor's Dilemma (The)	397
Festival	393
Grand Prize (The)	385
*Hatful of Rain (A)	213
*Heavenly Twins (The)	220
Henry IV, Part I	282
H.M.S. Pinafore	see 275
Honeys (The)	314
*Inherit the Wind	322
Island of Goats	260
Iolanthe	275
*Lark (The)	206
Master Builder (The)	349
Mikado (The)	see 275
*No Time for Sergeants	238
Once Upon a Tailor	305
Othello	285
Phoenix '55	317
Pirates of Penzance (The)	see 275
*Plain and Fancy	382
Princess Ida	see 275
*Roomful of Roses (A)	241
Ruddigore	see 275
Seventh Heaven	302
*Silk Stockings	354
Skin of Our Teeth (The)	293
Southwest Corner (The)	374
3 For Tonight	337
*Tiger at the Gates	264
Time of Your Life (The)	390
Tonight in Samarkand	365
Trial by Jury	see 275
*Vamp (The)	210
*View From the Bridge (A)	272
Wayward Saint (The)	362
*Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?	246
Wisteria Trees (The)	377
Wooden Dish (The)	254
Yeomen of the Guard (The)	see 275
*Young and Beautiful (The)	267

CRITIC'S CIRCLE AWARD 340

Theatre Openings

"The Lark"

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of November 21, 1955*

Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

All Reviews copyrighted by the newspapers and reproduced by permission.

Yearly Subscription $25.00

Published by CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS, Inc., 235 East 22nd Street, New York 10, N. Y.

"The Lark"

NEW YORK Herald Tribune
November 1st, 1955

THEATER

'The Lark'

By WALTER F. KERR

IT HAS remained for a woman dramatist to give us the first really tough-minded Joan of Arc. Lillian Hellman is, of course, only the adapter of Jean Anouilh's "The Lark." But that 'only" may be misleading. I have a strong suspicion that a great deal of the biting briskness, the cleaver-sharp determination, the haughty and hard-headed candor of this Joan comes from the pen of the lady who carved out, and carved up, "The Little Foxes."

The essential vision of the piece—the particular slant that defines the upstart of Orleans this time around—is no doubt Anouilh's. We are offered no peasant dreamer, no visionary who begins with her head in the clouds and keeps it firmly aloft in a poetic cloud forever after. In the play at the Longacre Joan does begin by receiving a visit from St. Michael. She is, however, already abrupt with him, prepared to terminate the conversation when she chooses, restlessly eager to hire herself a horse.

And once she has started to plough her way through France, and France's way through the English armies, there is no further question of heavenly voices. Joan has a secret, which she spills to the Dauphin the first time she meets him. It is the news that "God gave man an inside to his head and doesn't want it wasted." Joan's inspiration is divine; everything else she does must be accomplished humanly, with all of the painful effort, the tricks of flattery, the stomping and the shouting and the battering of blockheads that human activity involves.

Miss Hellman has seized this notion and pounded it out in words that clatter about the stage with the lively force and the unhesitant sound of a trip-hammer. 'Sire' may be the only word in the whole long evening with the faintest archaic ring about it. Joan wants the world to come to its senses, and she speaks sense to it; ticking off the Dauphin for the "little monkey" he is, buoying him up with a "Come on, Charlie!" and announcing "I'll put a stop to that!" whenever some silky politician or stodgy militarist gets in her way. The language is not affectedly modern, though: it has a simple, clear, timeless ring to it, and its directness is exhilarating.

Both authors are lucky. Julie Harris has the precise combination of country-girl naivete and irresistible boisterousness to speak this particular piece. There isn't a languid bone in her wired-together body, and she has a voice that would do credit to the noisiest kid on anybody's city-block. She can listen to a tune out of nowhere and begin stomping her boots on the earth with childlike suddenness; she can throw back her head—with its tomboy haircut that seems carved to her face—and say "I know I'm proud" with a dazzling honesty; and she can rub her knees in fear and perplexity when she is finally brought to trial without losing an ounce of the ragamuffin dignity that has helped her crown a king. She is the hardiest chick in the barnyard, and she is fiercely, wonderfully believable.

Joseph Anthony has directed the freely-arranged narrative with magical skill. Though the program indicates that the entire action takes place at 'The Trial,' the inventive structure actually slips with elusive grace in and out among the events of Joan's life, blending past and present in such a way that her inquisitors can deal intensely and intimately with the matter of a beating her father gave her long years ago. The imaginative fluidity of the staging is enormously aided by Joe Mielziner's shrewdly-arranged platforms against a vast, beautifully-lighted cyclorama, and Alvin Colt's costumes have a down-to-earth, well-worn air about them.

The supporting performances are not only of a consistent texture; the texture itself is brilliant. Boris Karloff's Cauchon is an agonized figure of great power and genuine warmth; the crumpled and baffled simplicity of his "My pride is less than yours" is very touching. Christopher Plummer's cynical, increasingly disturbed Englishman makes it clearer than ever that we have an actor of the first rank among us. Theodore Bikel makes an unforgettable five-minute vignette out of a fellow who imagines he is both handsome and intelligent, and Paul Roebling, Michael Higgins, and Bruce Gordon are excellent.

"THE LARK"

Play by Jean Anouilh; adapted by Lillian Hellman; staged by Joseph Anthony; scenery and lighting by Jo Mielziner; costumes by Alvin Colt; music composed by Leonard Bernstein; presented by Kermit Bloomgarden at the Longacre Theatre, November 17, 1955. The cast:

Warwick...Christopher Plummer
Cauchon.....Boris Karloff
Joan.....Julie Harris
Her Father.....Ward Costello
Mother.....Lois Holmes
Brother.....John Reese
The Promoter...Roger De Koven
The Inquisitor...Joseph Wiseman
Brother Ladvenu..Michael Higgins
Robert de Beaudricourt.....
Theodore Bikel
Agnes Sorel.....Ann Hillary
The Young Queen.....Joan Elan
The Dauphin.....Paul Roebling
Queen Yolande.....Rita Vale
M. de la Tremouille..Bruce Gordon
Archbishop of Rheims.....
Richard Nicholls
Executioner.....Ralph Roberts
English Soldier...Leonard Knight
Scribe.....Joe Bernard

The evening leaves a few things to be desired. There is a fairly leftfield philosophical gesture in the second act that momentarily tries to see Joan as "the natural man"; the effort seems extraneous and draws some of the fire from the gathering fury. And you may find yourself wanting, just once, an all-out emotional crisis that will stir you above and beyond your rapt intellectual attention.

But Joan has been given a stimulating new face; the familiar events seem freshly lived; and Julie Harris is cock of the walk.

The New York Times
November 1st, 1955

Theatre: St. Joan With Radiance

Julie Harris Stars in 'Lark' at Longacre

By BROOKS ATKINSON

ALTHOUGH the story of St. Joan is old, the spirit is endlessly new. Lighted by the radiance of Julie Harris, it is magnificent again in Jean Anouilh's "The Lark," which was acted at the Longacre last evening.

This is the drama that seemed no more than an intellectual attitude in Christopher Fry's adaptation in London last spring. It is still basically intellectual, the work of a French dramatist who likes to reason his way through a sacred mystery. But Lillian Hellman's adaptation has solid strength in the theatre.

And the scheme of the production, under Joseph Anthony's direction, is bold and grand. Grand in spirit, that is. For Jo Mielziner's settings are about as simple as any he has designed, and Alvin Colt's costumes are unpretentious. But the sculptural candor of the actors' figures against the soft glory of a background that is sparingly designed, the tension of the groupings in the trial scenes, the graphic lighting and the severity of the performance compose a memorable picture of a moment that is immortal in history and exalting on the stage.

At the center of the stage and of the play is the fiery particle that makes them live. It is the small, delicately molded figure of Miss Harris as the Maid. Around her on higher elevations the mighty forces are ranged—the conscience and law of the church, the might of the army, the cupidity of politics.

It is the lesson of St. Joan that the power drawn up against her cannot vanquish her soul. The lesson has never been acted more vividly. For Miss Harris' modesty of person and splendor of spirit, as well as her skill as an actress, have brought us a triumphant performance. It is all truth. There is no theatrical guile in it anywhere. Everything Miss Harris does and says bears directly on the agony of the peasant girl who became a martyr because, as always, the world could not afford the presence of a saint.

Everyone who writes about St. Joan has to deal with the same characters and facts. That is why "The Lark" inevitably seems like a rearrangement of Shaw's masterpiece. "The Lark" is more diffident. M. Anouilh's reasoned speculation has little of Shaw's intellectual passion. For Shaw was a political philosopher bent on condemning the errors and malice of institutions. M. Anouilh's drama is more like an intellectual reverie.

But the facts are overwhelming in any context. And if M. Anouilh is detached, the conviction of this production and performance overbalance him. Leonard Bernstein's musical recreation of Joan's medieval voices gives the play a new dimension.

The acting is superb all the way through. Although Boris Karloff has been for years associated with hokum parts in the theatre, he is the paternal, sorrowful, pleading Cauchon in "The Lark," and he is admirable. Christopher Plummer's Earl of Warwick is another one of his distinguished character portraits. He is worldly and cynical but mentally agile and responsive to a notable occasion. The venomous piety of Joseph Wiseman's Inquisitor runs ominously through the whole play, although his part in it is a short one. As the sensual Robert de Beaudricourt, Theodore Bikel is artless and human enough to bring a cerebral play down to earth whenever he appears.

Some grave ideas are examined in M. Anouilh's drama. "He who loves man does not love God," one of the church's bureaucrats declares. While the author of "The Lark" analyzes the story of the Maid of Orleans, the director and the actors redeem his drama from over-rationalization by infusing the performance with love of the theatre. They are acting the play beautifully. The luminous Miss Harris has bestowed on it her finest, most touching performance.

New York Post

November 18, 1955

By Richard Watts Jr.

A Stirring Play About Joan of Arc

How wonderful the theater can be when everything goes right! One of those rare and exciting occasions took place at the Longacre last night, where "The Lark," Jean Anouilh's play about Joan of Arc, had its first local performance. In the play itself, in Lillian Hellman's adaptation from the French, in the acting of Julie Harris and every member of the cast, in Joseph Anthony's staging and Jo Mielziner's set and lighting, in the general style of the production, there was a brilliant alliance of the dramatic arts, and the result was memorable.

Of the various personal triumphs involved in a superb example of theatrical teamwork, the one which springs first to mind is that of Julie Harris. No one has doubted for a long time that Miss Harris is an actress of rare sensitivity and distinction, but, despite all her past fine work, never before has she provided such a lovely combination of emotional warmth, sense of characterization, insight, delicacy of feeling, personal distinction and sheer rightness of touch. There may have been finer plays about Joan of Arc, but I've never seen a finer portrayal of Joan.

The opportunity for such general excellence of theater work goes back, of course, to Jean Anouilh, who has written a beautiful and moving play, but the most enthusiastic credit also goes to Miss Hellman for her distinguished adaptation. In the London version of "The Lark," where the adaptation was made by the eloquent Christopher Fry, the peril of the drama was that scene after scene called up comparisons with Shaw's magnificent "St. Joan," and they were not to the advantage of the Anouilh work. Miss Hellman has happily changed all that.

By occasional changes and omissions in text and the general straightforwardness and force of her style, she has made "The Lark" stand in its own right and power. Without sacrificing eloquence or lyric exultation, she has added the dramatic impact and conciseness of her personal quality, making her the perfect collaborator with Anouilh's Gallic intelligence and understanding. What results is a compassionate, admiring and yet steadily realistic and believable portrait of Joan, set down in a drama of beauty, humor and emotional power.

In form, the play is a dramatization of Joan's trial. It begins with her appearance before her clerical accusers, and, in the course of it, there is an opportunity to go back to episodes in the Maid's career. Although "The Lark" takes Joan inexorably to her execution, it manages to achieve a triumphant ending for her, but does so without sacrificing tragedy or truth. There is a striking compactness in the narrative, and, while the appeal is more emotional than intellectual, there is always present an intelligence that is far above sentimentality.

The playing throughout is worthy of Miss Harris. All of the performances are close to perfection, and it will not be easy to forget the stern sympathy of Boris Karloff as Cauchon, the ironic understanding of Christopher Plummer's Warwick, the passionate fanaticism of Joseph Wiseman's Inquisitor, the fatuous but oddly pathetic Dauphin of Paul Roebling, the venomous hatred of Roger DeKoven's Promoter, the friendly compassion of Michael Higgin's Brother Ladvenu, the good-natured roughness of Bruce Gordon's LaHire, or Theodore Bikel's brilliantly humorous scene as the helpful Beaudricourt. "The Lark" is a moving dramatic experience.

Daily Mirror

November 18, 1955

Robert Coleman's THEATRE:

'The Lark' Proves Spell-Binding, Witty

• Joan of Arc story retold in fine adaptation by Lillian Hellman.

In "The Lark" Jean Anouilh has re-told the story of Joan of Arc. Lillian Hellman has made an excellent adaptation of it. And Kermit Bloomgarden has given it a stellar production. All of which will probably make the new arrival at the Longacre the most successful of the numerous Anouilh works to be done in America.

Wasn't it Carl Van Doren who described a classic as something so right that there is no need for ever doing it again? Well, G. B. Shaw, in our opinion, penned the definitive play about the Maid of Orleans. It was called, of course, "Saint Joan."

STILL, the saga of this simple peasant girl, who freed her country and crowned a monarch, is such a fascinating one that authors, we suspect, will be attempting to create classics around it for ages to come. If Anouilh has not achieved the stature of Shaw, he has nevertheless managed to write an intelligent and absorbing drama.

There is a Gallic shrewdness and irony about his work that are intriguing. And some of his observations are original and pertinent. His major premise, we think, is that God gave man the sense to bring off the seemingly miraculous, to work wonders in a mundane world.

His heroine, Joan, believes the Deity helps those who help themselves. True, she has a vision, but, she reasons, what good is it if it isn't brought to fulfillment through action? And, though it means burning at the stake, she courageously obeys her "voices."

UNDER Joseph Anthony's fluid direction, Anouilh's characters become vivid—people, as well as intellectual viewpoints. The hub of the wheel is Julie Harris, who personates Joan with a sincerity and simplicity that are often touching. If it is not an inspired Joan, it is at least an earnest and understandable one.

As for the spokes, Christopher Plummer is an admirable Warwick, cynical, clever, realistic and still quite human. Boris Karloff, a fine and versatile actor, is moving as the kindly and compassionate Cauchon. Joseph Wiseman is highly effective as the theoretical, uncompromising Inquisitor.

We don't think you'll soon forget Paul Roebling's Dauphin, a not-very-bright, self-pitying, yet canny, princeling. Theodre Bikel is a forthright, full-blooded De Beaudricourt. And salutes should go to Ward Costello, Bruce Gordon, Lois Holmes, Roger De Koven, Michael Higgins, Ann Hillary, Joan Elan and, especially, Rita Vale.

JO MIELZINER has devised another of his imaginative productions: steps on different levels against a cyclorama. With a few props, a slide projector, and skillful lighting, he evokes a whole section of France. Alvin Colt's costumes and Leonard Bernstein's incidental score are other assets.

If "The Lark"—the lark who became a great bird through martyrdom—be not a masterpiece, it is, however, a distinguished contribution to a theatre that needs a few. It proved spell-binding for the initial audience. It has flashing wit, emotional impact and the power to make you think and feel.

New York World-Telegram and The [illegible] Sun

November 18, 1955

Julie Harris Captures Inner Beauty of Joan

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Julie Harris is a terrifying and wonderful actress. She proves it once again in "The Lark." This crisp and shining new version of the Joan of Arc story has been fashioned by Lillian Hellman from a French play by Jean Anouilh.

The young star of the new Longacre drama portrays a Joan who has no relation to the Victorian statue ideas we are so accustomed to. This is an undernourished farm girl of wiry strength and burning spirit.

Sometimes she looks like a pale capuchin monkey. Her power and her beauty come from the inside. The outside is a fragile vehicle, which every once in a while glows fire.

Inner Conviction.

More than anyone else in our theater, Julie Harris seems able to make a vacuum of her civilian self and let dramatic experience take possession of her. Her expressions and movements are the result of inner conviction, never a technical means of conveying an idea.

This Joan in Miss Harris' hands is frightening because she so often seems a child playing at real army. The great difference is, of course, that she means it all.

The play starts and ends with the trial. Scenes are reenacted as they occur in testimony. Comments from the courtroom interrupt them.

Beautiful Scene.

Anouilh's Joan has a slower time getting started than Shaw's. Her fight begins with her family. The second big hurdle is convincing the local Sire of her belief.

This is a gem of a scene, beautifully played with Miss Harris by Theodore Bikel, as